



I hope so.

Steve Vinton, September 29, 2007

I walked to the hilltop there in the village of Ulolela to look down on that field where just three months ago in June Emmanuel had given his speech to the thousands of people who had gathered to talk with us about starting a secondary school. I saw again snapshots in my mind of the crowd of women who were dancing. I could see us being carried over the tops of people's heads through the crowd. I could see Emmanuel bringing the crowd to silence and then giving the speech that had so inspired my soul and so inspired the people of that village.

The field was empty back then.

But today, as I looked over to my right, it was full of mounds and mounds of foundation stones. I knew that it would have taken an incredible number of trucks to have hauled all of those stones and dumped them there, and therefore it was really in utter amazement that I looked at all of those mounds of stones with the knowledge that every single one of those stones had been carried on someone's head I can't even begin to imagine how far. To my left, brick kiln after brick kiln -- not tens of thousands of bricks my friends, hundreds of thousands of bricks! 210,000 already and more being made every day. The hours of work in the hot sun, the hauling of water, the carrying of the bricks to the kilns to be fired -- I couldn't see all of that work but I knew it was that incredible work, day after day, week after week, which had produced those bricks. And there right in the middle of it all were the remains of the kibanda -- the huge makeshift baraza that they had built that day back in June to shade us from the sun -- the whole thing was all dried out, it was falling down, it would soon disappear, in fact it was almost already gone. It

was there that I had been given a place to sit and I listened to Emmanuel give that speech that had so enthralled me, that had so reminded me of my grandfather the way he used to speak to the crowds of people back when he and I were together in Congo. With the emotion of that day, I remember thinking that those people could have moved mountains!

I was wrong of course. Emotion only lasts for a very, very brief time and so it simply can't move mountains. Emotion can't get you very far when you have to haul those stones up that hill and when the sun is burning down on you while you are making bricks. Emmanuel may have stirred their emotions that day, but it was not emotion that caused the people of the village of Ulolela to do all of this work. It was conviction. Conviction that finally the time had come in the history of their village, in the history of their people, in the history of their lives, that a school would be built and that their children would get an education.

That was in the village of Ulolela, at the beginning of our long trip to villages in the Ruvuma region! Our second new school was being born in the village of Mpepo. Wow! Mpepo is the village where Sanga will head tomorrow to get the building program started, where we are told there are even more bricks than in this village -- perhaps as many as 400,000 already -- plus an incredible amount of foundation stones, and, what still seems to my mind to be almost impossible, just over six million one hundred thousand Tanzanian shillings (that's about \$5000) collected by the men and women in the village of Mpepo. You see, there is no sand in their village, or else they'd carry it all, so instead they've collected

money to rent trucks to haul the sand. And there is no water in that part of the village where they want to build the school, so they are buying pipes to bring water from the mountain down to where the school is to be built. In my heart I'd love to go with Sanga to Mpepo so I could stand again on the hillside where we first held the town meeting in that village last June as well and to actually see with my own eyes all of their bricks. But Godfrey and Emmanueli have really good reasons why they want me to go to Malindindo tomorrow, and so off I go! It's not all bad though. I get to go with Justin -- he's one of my own students from years ago -- and he's come to use his month off from classes to help another guy, Fanweli, get started in the village of Malindindo on building our new school there. Justin's got experience under his belt -- he worked with the folks in Kising'a to build their school and so we're counting on him to show Fanweli the ropes. I'm going so I can talk to the village leaders but that's the "work part" of my travels -- my fun though is going to be able to watch Justin wander over that site, to lay out with Fanweli where the first six classrooms will go, where the administration building and the library will be, where the teachers' houses will be. I get to see my former student do that. I love being a teacher here.

Of course our four day trip to Ruvuma was not all about going to villages and holding town meetings and getting to see brick kilns and foundation stones and to trace through in our minds where buildings, existing as of yet only in our minds, would one day be built.

We also had to go into government offices.

It's normally the part of building schools that I have to confess I positively hate. I think I've gotten old. Which is why I'm so thankful that Godfrey is now so good at it that he normally gives me something rather outrageously important -- and mundane to do -- like running off to photocopy things while he handles that part of our lives that I'm so glad isn't my job anymore. So this morning I indeed did

"important things" on the computer, while Godfrey headed off into the government office here to get the signature that we need for those three schools. We can't after all just build schools just because we've got this strong conviction that God wants us to do it! We've also got to have some government official sign some papers before we actually get to work. Godfrey chuckled afterwards as he told me about walking into the office and finding behind the desk someone who was already an old friend -- the man who had signed off and helped us get Idigima Secondary School up and running earlier this year! He had just been transferred to this new region of the country and he was thrilled to hear that we had just this past Saturday taken three of our missionary teachers to Idigima to start teaching there, that enrollment in that school was now nearing 400 students, and that our students had made all of the bricks themselves to build the administration building and the library.

But when we got back in the car, thrilled with success at getting all the papers signed in less than a half hour, we talked about emotion. Emotion? It doesn't get schools built. The work ahead of us is huge. To build these three new schools in three months so that school can open in January -- emotion will never do that. In fact, any sane person would say that it's impossible what we're trying to do. We have thousands of sheets of metal roofing that have to be hauled into those villages before the rains start because once they start, no truck will dare to make the trip. Emmanueli will have his work cut out for him hauling it all with Mwanaume! Truckload after truckload of cement. Chapakazi will really get a work out. And the amount of work that thousands of people are going to have to do in those three villages, day after day, week after week, month after month is enough to take my breath away. Emotion doesn't do any of that. Godfrey hit the nail on the head -- you couldn't pay people enough money so that those schools could be built in just three months -- and yet the schools are definitely going to get built. Because those

people have a conviction and a resolve that the time has finally come when their kids should get to go to school. Every kid. Every boy. Every girl. No matter how poor their parents are. No matter if their parents are already dead.

I think of those new missionary teachers who just arrived a couple of weeks ago. There's no salary large enough that anyone could pay them to come live in these villages and teach these kids. And yet, we have people here, so wonderfully qualified, again not brought here by emotion, but brought here by a strong conviction, deep inside of them, that has compelled them to come. They are coming because they have a conviction that God wants them to help those on the bottom, those Jesus calls "the least of these", because they have a conviction that God wants them to share the gospel with their students and with their families, because they have a conviction that God wants them to be in some small way His hands and His feet to reach out to those who are hurting. I think of Godfrey and Emmanuelli and Janerose and realize that you couldn't pay anyone enough to do what they do and in the way that they do it. They do what they do because they have a strong conviction that God

wants them to do this with their lives and that it's a privilege that He somehow chose to let them be a part of His program. I think of people like Justin and James and all of the rest of them who give up their vacations to come work with us to get more schools built and I marvel that they're not off working somewhere during their vacation to make even a little bit of money to take back with them when classes resume. They are not doing this because of some fleeting emotion – you don't go hundreds of miles away to a village where you know no one to help build a school during your vacation because one day you felt a little emotion! I think of all of the old ladies who haul water and men who make bricks and those who haul stones on their heads and I know that they've not only worked hard they've given up working in their fields or doing things they need to do to provide for the immediate needs of their families. And when I think about all of that, I find myself beginning to believe, maybe just maybe, that what has begun here in one village and seems to keep spreading to more and more villages, just might turn out to be something that God intends to be simply unstoppable.

I hope so.